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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 9, 1997

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, DC 20541

The Honorable Reed E. Hundt
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW - Room 814
Washington, DC 20554

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Dear Mr. Chairman:

We are writing again as authors of the Snowe-Rockefeller-Exon-Kerrey provision of the Telecommunications Competition and Deregulation Act (PL 104-104). We appreciate your responsiveness to our previous correspondence in assembling the Telemedicine Advisory Committee and for their hard work. Today, we are writing in regard to the Joint Board's recent decision on the universal services provisions for rural health care providers.

As you are no doubt aware, a shortage of family doctors, pediatricians, nurse practitioners and other primary care providers has been a chronic problem in rural areas. Access to a medical specialist has been practically nonexistent unless a rural citizen was willing and able to travel, sometimes a very long distance, to be treated. Telemedicine helps providers and patients overcome these access problems. And, of course, when minutes, even seconds, count, having the instant availability of emergency consultations can literally mean the difference between life and death.

Although telemedicine surmounts the long distances intrinsic to rural health care when it comes to time and travel, these long distances have resulted in prohibitively expensive transmission rates for rural facilities. The federal Office of Rural Health Policy has identified distance-based rates as a major financial barrier to the development of telemedicine. Ensuring affordable transmission rates is the central tenet of the Snowe-Rockefeller-Exon-Kerrey amendment. While we understand the Joint-Board's desire to obtain additional data, the law specifically states that rates should be comparable to urban rates, meaning it prohibits the use of distance in determining transmission rates. Legislative intent is very clear on that point.

We appreciate the Joint Board's receptiveness to the Advisory Committee's recommendation that Universal Service Funds be used to augment the telecommunications infrastructure. We strongly support the idea that part of the Universal Service Fund be used for the construction or upgrade of infrastructure.

Just as patients are isolated from specialists in rural areas, practitioners are also isolated from their medical colleagues and other resources. Internet access allows practitioners to use diagnostic software, obtain information from medical journals and libraries and consult with

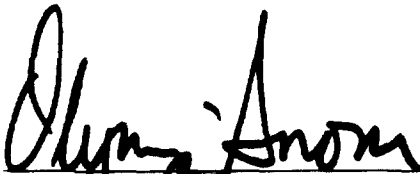
The Honorable Reed E. Hundt
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their colleagues. In rural areas a telephone call to access the Internet is often charged at the long-distance rate. In order to help providers give the best care to their patients, we support local-toll rates for Internet access.

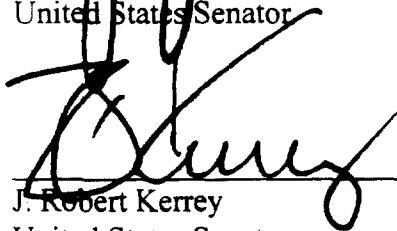
We are also pleased that the Advisory Committee recommended a flexible and frequently reviewed implementation program. With the rapid advances being made in telemedicine technologies it is especially important that the program evolves to meet changing circumstances and opportunities.

We are appreciative of your efforts and those of the Joint Board and the Telemedicine Advisory Committee. We will continue to follow the implementation of our legislation closely. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss these issues further, please contact Tom Geier in Senator Snowe's office, Shana Phares in Senator Rockefeller's office and Karen Davenport in Senator Kerrey's office.

Sincerely,



Olympia J. Snowe
United States Senator



J. Robert Kerrey
United States Senator



John D. Rockefeller IV
United States Senator



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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The Honorable Olympia J. Snowe
United States Senate
495 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20541

Dear Senator Snowe:

The Snowe-Rockefeller-Exon-Kerrey provision of the Telecommunications Act is a giant step toward increasing access to high quality health care services for Americans in rural areas. My fellow Commissioners and I recognize the impact that rates for telecommunications services can have on the ability of rural health care providers to use telehealth services, and are pleased to have the opportunity to make rates for rural providers comparable to rates in urban areas.

I would like to express appreciation for the ongoing support that you and the other co-sponsors have given the Commission in implementing your provision. Your letter in regard to the Joint Board's recommended decision underscores the importance of several issues of great significance to the Advisory Committee and to the Commission. We look forward to continuing to work with you to translate the promise of your provision into tangible results.

Sincerely,

Reed Hundt
Chairman



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller IV
United States Senate
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

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Dear Senator Rockefeller:

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Sincerely,

Reed Hundt
Chairman



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The Honorable J. Robert Kerrey
United States Senate
303 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

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Sincerely,

Reed Hundt
Chairman